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Development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations: progress report on the pilot project

Report by the Secretary-General

1. In resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, the General Assembly requested "the Department of Public Information to start, as soon as possible, the implementation of the pilot project" relevant to the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations "through, *inter alia*, contacts with interested Member States and other specialized institutions, with a view to ensuring the assistance necessary for the success of the project, taking into account the need to enhance the existing resources and services". The General Assembly further requested the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of the pilot project to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session.

2. In resolution 54/250 A, part VII, of 23 December 1999, on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, covering section 26, Public Information, the General Assembly outlined the budgetary elements necessary for the implementation of the project.

3. In his report to the Committee on Information (A/AC.198/1999/5), the Secretary-General stated that the purpose of the pilot project was to test the technical feasibility, programming capacity, resource requirements and listeners' interest in the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations.

4. The present report provides details of the progress made to date with regard to the preparations for the implementation of the pilot project and the project's integral role in the process of modernization of United Nations Radio. It also provides a summary of the results of the survey questionnaires conducted to determine the readiness of radio networks and satellite distribution systems in different regions to provide airtime for the pilot project. Also included is a summary of the conclusions of an overall review of the current patterns of radio programme production and distribution, carried out by the Department of Public Information in preparation for the implementation of the radio pilot project.

I. Results of the questionnaire surveys of radio stations

5. Two questionnaire surveys were carried out in 1999 and early 2000 to determine the readiness of radio stations in different regions to participate in the pilot project and assess the capacity of stations to provide

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airtime or satellite distribution for the daily news package.

6. The first questionnaire survey was managed by the Department of Public Information and covered the Caribbean region. The survey was conducted from May to July 1999 and achieved a very high response rate of 80 per cent, with 65 per cent of stations willing to provide airtime for the project. In total, 26 radio stations were contacted, and 17 expressed an interest in participation in the pilot project.

7. In December 1999, the Department of Public Information commissioned an independent consultant to manage the second survey, aimed at determining the readiness of radio stations in other regions — Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Europe — to provide airtime or satellite distribution arrangements for the pilot project. A survey questionnaire was sent to 583 radio stations, chosen to represent radio broadcasters in Member States. This included 160 national broadcasters and a range of other public and commercial stations with a reasonable degree of speech, news and current affairs content.

8. The preliminary results of the second survey, which was launched in January and had a deadline of 22 February 2000, achieved an overall response rate of 26 per cent, which is on the low side. Responses varied by region, with the highest response rate from Africa (39 per cent) and the lowest from the United States of America and Canada (5 per cent). Response rates from other regions were: Europe (35 per cent), the Russian Federation/Commonwealth of Independent States (28 per cent), Central and South America (19 per cent), Middle East/North Africa (18 per cent), Indian subcontinent (13 per cent), East/South-East Asia/Far East and Australasia (13 per cent).

9. Some differences in methodology account for the variation in response rates for the two surveys, as follows:

(a) For the Caribbean survey, managed internally by the Department of Public Information, the sample of stations surveyed was much smaller and the time-scale more extensive than for the second survey. Also, a much smaller geographical area was covered, which meant that the initial distribution of the questionnaire and subsequent follow-up were simpler and easier to manage;

(b) Because of the tight deadline for submission of the questionnaire, the time-scale for completion of the second survey was more limited, affecting the time available for essential follow-up. The scale of the second survey was also much larger and, as a rule, response rates for large-scale surveys are commonly lower than those for small-scale surveys.

10. The consultant will continue to monitor and collate late responses to the survey and keep the Department of Public Information informed of additional information provided by respondents.

11. Despite the response rate, the results of the second survey also provide an indication of interest in the proposed radio pilot project: 89 radio stations were interested in participation. Seventy-one expressed unconditional interest, while 18 showed conditional interest and requested samples of the programming or some form of technical/financial assistance in order to proceed further. Overall, these results suggest that there is sufficient interest in the project to take it further, since 80 per cent of the respondents indicated an unconditional interest in participation.

12. The surveys provide a good foundation to build on to ensure that the development of the pilot project is based on an understanding of the needs of individual radio stations in different regions. Additional steps are being taken to contact those major national broadcasters that are current partners of United Nations Radio but have not responded to the second survey. The aim is to develop an enhanced broadcasting relationship with those key broadcasters through the launch of the pilot project.

13. United Nations Radio will also continue a system of regular feedback and monitoring of radio stations' needs and preferences in order accurately to measure progress and response to the pilot project.

A. Airtime for the pilot project

14. The initial results of the second survey revealed that the availability of airtime for the pilot project differs markedly by region. Overall readiness is higher in developing countries and among stations without sufficient resources to permit in-depth or daily coverage of the activities of the United Nations, suggesting that due consideration should be given to development of the project in progressive stages. Further steps should be taken to encourage additional

national broadcasting organizations to support the pilot project by providing airtime or satellite distribution, which would help overcome the difficult situation of servicing a large number of small radio stations with fragmented audiences. In Africa south of the Sahara, with the highest response rate to the second survey, 27 stations (16 anglophone, 11 francophone), including many national networks, expressed interest in the pilot project.

15. There has also been a degree of interest among small private stations in Central/South America, a number of stations in Europe, some stations in the Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States and among several international broadcasters. In Europe, for example, Radio France Internationale, a major global broadcaster, which did not respond to the survey, has in a separate initiative expressed to the Department of Public Information its readiness to discuss making airtime available for the project on its global satellite distribution network.

16. Interest in the pilot project among broadcasters in the Middle East/North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, East and South-East Asia and the Far East, Australasia, the United States and Canada, was much lower. The consultant suggested that more direct and personal contact on the ground might be required to stimulate interest in the project in those areas.

17. It was also suggested that since major broadcasters, particularly those from the United States and Canada, have correspondents stationed at the United Nations or already have good access to sources of information on the United Nations, the pilot project holds less interest for them.

18. In view of the results of the two questionnaire surveys, the Department of Public Information is considering ways and means of allocating resources in the most effective manner to ensure global dissemination of daily radio news from the United Nations to interested national and regional audiences through the pilot project. This means that United Nations Radio should continue to focus both on key markets, where there are strong national broadcasters with wide audience reach, and on underserved regions, where local or national news sources are in short supply.

19. On 6 October 1999, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information wrote to the permanent representatives of all Member States, summarizing relevant provisions of the recommendations regarding the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, adopted by the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session (May 1999). In his letter, he outlined the resources required and requested the views of Member States and their relevant institutions as to their readiness to make contributions towards the implementation of the project, in the form of airtime on broadcasting facilities or cash contributions to a trust fund.

20. The letter also sought the support of Member States for the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity. It requested their assistance in approaching organizations involved in the broadcasting industry to make contributions, in cash or in kind, towards the implementation of the pilot project. The letter was accompanied by a questionnaire exploring the readiness of national broadcasting networks and satellite distribution operators to make airtime available for the broadcast of a daily United Nations radio programme package.

21. The Department of Public Information received responses from a limited number of Member States, none of which offered any financial contribution or commitment. The majority of responses confirmed readiness to participate in the project by offering airtime for the daily pilot project. They were supplemented by the results of the two questionnaire surveys that are reviewed in section II above. At the time of preparation of this report, a total of 114 radio stations and networks, including 11 international broadcasting organizations in 58 countries from all regions of the world, had expressed interest in participating in the pilot radio project by making a daily segment of airtime on their transmission facilities available for United Nations radio broadcasts. In view of the lack of any specific commitment to a financial contribution, it has been deemed necessary that the Department redeploy the amount of US$ 1,760,300 from its approved programme budget for the 2000-2001 biennium for implementation of the pilot project. However, the Department will continue its efforts to seek extrabudgetary support for the project, since any extrabudgetary resources secured for the purpose would minimize the need for redeployment.

B. Different markets, different needs

22. In his report to the Committee on Information (A/AC.198/1999/5), the Secretary-General also recognized that programme design and the frequency of delivery may vary from region to region. The survey results support this view and need to be reflected in the development, production and delivery of the pilot package to different target regions. The implementation of the pilot project will proceed in accordance with the needs and interests of broadcasting stations in the Member States concerned, ensuring a demand-driven approach to the process of planning and developing the pilot project, in a way that would best utilize the available resources.

C. Distribution

23. The preferred method of distribution for the radio stations surveyed varied by region and according to the state of technological development in the receiving country. Satellite delivery was preferred overall, although both digital telephone lines (ISDN) and electronic file transfer (FTP) transmissions via Internet were requested by a significant minority of stations. This suggests that, at this stage, all three methods of dissemination need to be universally available. This conclusion is in line with the aim of United Nations Radio to expand multimedia dissemination via satellite, file transfer on the Internet, and, where possible, through audio streaming and downloadable audio files posted on the United Nations web site, to reach a broad mix of shortwave, AM and FM broadcasters around the world. This, however, is subject to many variables and to the significant disparities in the availability of Internet services in different regions of the world.

II. Programme review

24. In his report to the Committee on Information, the Secretary-General indicated that, in planning the staff and technical production resources for the pilot project, appropriate programme formats and modes of transmission would be adapted to ensure timely and more frequent delivery of programmes to meet the daily needs of the pilot project. The Secretary-General also stated that the achievement of this objective might include streamlining programme production and scaling down tape programme distribution.

25. Additional feedback from the questionnaire surveys and ongoing consultations with radio stations suggest that there is decreasing need for tape distribution in all regions and an increasing preference for more direct and reliable forms of distribution, such as satellite, ISDN and the Internet.

26. With this in mind, in January and February 2000, the Department of Public Information conducted a programme review, in order to address the major issues involved in developing the capacity of United Nations Radio to manage more effectively the production and distribution of the proposed daily pilot project, in line with the ongoing modernization of the Radio Service, which should result in better targeting and more frequent and timelier delivery of programmes. As part of the programme review, the following issues were all examined: streamlining and reorientation of current programming and distribution, development of the daily pilot package, development of news sources and content, training, logistics, promotion, monitoring and feedback.

27. The Department is planning to survey those broadcasters that currently receive United Nations programming on tape, in order to establish their preferred method of distribution. Where possible and where there are viable alternatives, tape distribution and its programme format will be curtailed or phased out.

28. Some weekly magazine programmes also need to be consolidated and reformulated and their resources realigned to allow for the production of new programme formats and to support the production of daily programming for the pilot project. Final identification of changes in programming, format and mode of distribution is dependent on the specific needs and requirements of radio stations in each region.

29. United Nations Radio will need to undergo a general repositioning exercise in order to mobilize resources to meet the daily production and distribution schedule of the pilot project in the six official languages. In that context, regional programme services would be further strengthened by providing, from within the approved level of resources available to the Department of Public Information, additional resources for their multilingual production and broadcasting capacity to ensure the consistent and effective delivery of the daily programme package in the six official languages. In order to streamline tape

programme production, optimize the use of existing resources and create a cost-effective structure for the implementation of the pilot project, the Department is initiating a survey of radio stations that receive tape programmes by mail or pouch in order to ascertain their usefulness and the possibility of replacing some of those programmes with the more timely delivery of a daily package of news, features, interviews, summaries of meetings and field reports. The structure of the Radio Service would also be strengthened by creating for the pilot project a central news-gathering unit, a programme research and planning unit and the position of a news editor, which would be accommodated within the approved level of resources available to the Department. They would be responsible for forward planning and daily news gathering so that information is pooled as a central resource for use by all languages and units. It is also envisaged that the implementation of the pilot project would be accompanied by transitional arrangements, whereby part of the tape programme production and distribution would be maintained and improved.

30. In cooperation with a major broadcasting organization, the Department of Public Information has organized, in preparation for the pilot project, a training programme to be held in April 2000 to refresh or upgrade staff producers' skills. Internal training workshops in a number of areas, including courses in the use of new technology, have been identified to supplement that training.

31. In an effort to ensure effective outreach, a plan would be developed to provide adequate promotion, monitoring and feedback on the effectiveness of the pilot project and to strengthen relationships with partner-broadcasters.

32. As part of the review, an audit of current programme production capacity and human resource levels has been completed. The audit indicates that the pilot project production of a daily package of 15-minute programmes in English, French and Spanish would be possible through adjustments, without substantial additional resources. Accordingly, the resources in certain official languages, including Arabic, Chinese and Russian, will need to be enhanced. This will be predicated on a minimum standard resource requirement of four full-time producers per language, a backup producer, a production assistant and a research assistant, in addition to the central services provided by the planned news and research units. The pool of staff resources in English and French is deemed adequate for meeting the production requirements of the daily programme package. The additional requirements for other languages are built into the supplementary resources that have been approved in paragraphs 155 and 156 of General Assembly resolution 54/249.

33. In some units and regions, an effective small-scale daily production and distribution system for United Nations Radio programmes already exists. The Department is aware that in developing this new initiative, current successes must be built upon and not compromised by the new project.

III. Modernization

34. Modernization is under way on several fronts. The introduction of a network system of digital audio workstations a few years ago has revolutionized United Nations Radio production. Initially, the network was confined to the United Nations studio production areas, but it has recently been expanded to include the editorial offices of United Nations Radio. It is the intention of the Department to make further progress by integrating the existing digital production system with a digital delivery mechanism.

35. The long-term plan is to record live audio material from the conference rooms directly onto a central audio server which will interface with the United Nations digital audio workstation network and a digital archival storage. This will be linked to an automated delivery system that will enable staggered access to audio material for different time zones around the world. For faster delivery of news programming to broadcasting stations, the central audio server will also enable United Nations Radio producers to edit, at their own desktops, the audio distributed via the Intranet and Internet.

36. As the United Nations upgrades equipment and migrates to digital technology, the Radio Service will be better positioned to meet the distribution needs of radio stations that are ready to participate in the pilot project. Two immediate projects illustrate the coordination of such actions: the modernization of one of the radio studios and the upgrading of the international broadcasting centre.

IV. Conclusions

37. The development and implementation of the pilot project is one of the key components in the Department's overall drive to more effectively disseminate United Nations news directly to the media worldwide. It is also central to the ongoing modernization plans of United Nations Radio. The aim of the project is to enable United Nations Radio to increase the production and distribution of timely, regular news packages, targeted at different regions and meeting the needs of a wider range of audiences in disparate time zones.

38. The regional variations and preferences of radio stations in terms of their readiness to make airtime available for the pilot project were indicated in the two questionnaire surveys. The results highlight the need for United Nations Radio to pursue the most effective approach to the implementation of the pilot project, consistent with the level of interest and the availability of regular airtime.

39. In regions where there was a low response from radio stations to the survey questionnaire, the Department of Public Information will take additional steps to further survey the readiness of stations which may not be sufficiently aware of the project. This would include particular focus on current partners of United Nations Radio and on broadcasters with access to large national and international networks.

40. The questionnaire surveys and programme review have highlighted the need to streamline current programming, which would free up some staff resources that would be earmarked for the purpose of the implementation of the pilot project, while maintaining some elements of the tape programme production during the transitional period from weekly tape programme production and distribution to daily on-air broadcasting. The training service of a reputable international broadcasting organization concluded a two-week training workshop in April for all producers of the Radio Service, in preparation for the launch of the pilot project. At the same time, the positive responses received from broadcasting organizations in different regions have been tallied and divided into regional categories. The Department of Public Information will start contacting those organizations in order to agree on the preferred modes of transmission from New York to the target region and the broadcast schedule for the pilot project.

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Multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, the General Assembly took note with appreciation of the efforts of the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all official languages of the Organization, requested him to pursue those efforts and to continue to develop proposals for consideration by the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session, having in mind the goal of achieving modular parity among the official languages, and stressing that that goal should be achieved in a cost-effective manner and with a focus on textual content.

2. Recognizing the importance of parity among all United Nations official languages, the General Assembly, in its resolution 54/249 of 23 December 1999 on the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, decided to convert three positions relating to web sites in Arabic, Chinese and Russian into established posts.

II. Executive summary

3. The further development, coordination, production and management of information content on United Nations web sites will require a substantial increase in the level of investment, as will the upgrading of the related technical infrastructure. This is primarily based on the need to: (a) vastly increase the timely dissemination of information and data to a wider and rapidly growing audience; (b) effect cost savings by limiting hardcopy distribution, and/or by shifting printing to the end-user; (c) present information that is constantly updated; and (d) present and promote through the Internet, education and public understanding of the United Nations and of the issues before it.

4. In the context of consideration of the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites, the first task would be to rationalize the structure of the sites, requiring a feasibility study on the complete redesign and restructuring of the sites in order to render them more user-friendly and flexible. Such a study should be conducted through the use of outside industry experts. The cost of the study, which is not included in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, is estimated at US$ 100,000.

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5. Before such a study is undertaken, however, a sound foundation for ensuring the ongoing regular maintenance and enhancement of United Nations web sites needs to be established on the basis of resource requirements set out in proposal C-3, contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites, considered by the Committee on Information at its resumed twenty-first session, held from 1 to 5 November 1999 (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2). Without this administrative and budgetary support — the minimum necessary for the continuation of the present level of this activity — the desired objective of narrowing the differences among the web sites in all official languages, with the eventual achievement of parity, will not be attained. The resource requirements outlined in the present report pertain only to the requirements of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat with regard to the management, maintenance and enrichment of the web sites. The infrastructure and technical support requirements for the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, which are essential to this activity, have not been included. Provision of content in other languages will also require additional resources.

III. Background

6. The first report on this issue (A/AC.198/1999/6), considered by the Committee on Information during the first part of its twenty-first session in May 1999, outlined three proposals. The first option would have ensured full parity among all official languages by the end of 2001 and would cost $560 million in a one-time investment during 2000-2001 and approximately $26 million, excluding staff costs, in recurring biennial expenditures. The second option would have sought to achieve parity among all official languages on an incremental basis, and would have cost the same amount but the one-time investment would have been spread over a longer period of time. The third option would have sought to balance the need for parity and realistic availability of resources and would have concentrated on bolstering the existing set-ups with parity introduced in modules.

7. As requested by the Committee on Information, in the follow-up report considered at the resumed twenty-first session, (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2) three additional proposals were put forward, together with the respective resource requirements, under the third proposal (option C) mentioned in paragraph 6 above. The first entailed the translation and rendition of the contents of the present United Nations web sites into all official languages on an incremental basis with no time-frame for achieving full parity. The second proposed that only selected basic modules, including the audio-visual module, be translated and made available on the web sites on an ongoing basis. The third sought to establish a sound foundation for the current maintenance and enhancement activities of the web sites, with provision of content in other official languages related to the level of usage of the sites in those languages.

IV. United Nations web sites

8. The United Nations web site (www.un.org) was launched on 26 June 1995 as a pilot project in connection with the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization, in English only, and featuring basic information on the work of the Organization. It was formally launched in September of that year and has since evolved into one of the major activities of the Department, but without the corresponding allocation in the regular programme budget of the Organization. The web site has undergone a series of expansions, with the addition of French and Spanish sites in September 1996, a Russian site in April and Arabic and Chinese sites in November 1998. In March 1998, a daily United Nations radio news service in English and French was added, followed by Spanish soon thereafter. One year later in March 1999, the first United Nations audio-visual web site was launched, including United Nations radio feature programmes illustrated by photographs and other graphics, as well as audio and video clips. In addition, 31 United Nations information centres so far have also developed their own web sites in 17 languages to deliver the United Nations message and materials in local languages and adapted to the local context, as appropriate.

9. The United Nations web sites now transfer over nine gigabytes (9,000 megabytes) of information on a daily basis and receive approximately five million accesses every week from more than 152 countries. The tremendous growth in the use of the web sites is shown by the increase in the number of accesses: from

489,000 in January 1996 to over 12 million in January 1999 and 21 million in January 2000. This translates to serving more than 11 files every second, every day. It is important to emphasize that these accomplishments were all achieved from within existing resources.

V. Current situation

10. The United Nations web sites are managed by the Information Technology Section in the Department of Public Information, with content being generated in various parts of the Department and the Secretariat as well as by some offices away from Headquarters. While the Department provides overall presentation guidelines for the entire web site, technical support relating to hardware and software issues is the responsibility of the Information Technology Services Division in the Department of Management. Since the establishment of the web site in 1995, no additional resources have been allocated for this activity. As such, resources were reassigned from within the Department to initiate the activity, and recognizing that web site operations would become part of the Secretariat's regular activities, the Information Technology Section was created in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General to facilitate the overall coordination and management of the web site.

11. Similarly, it should be noted that the technical infrastructure support essential to this activity has also been provided by the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, within existing resources.

12. The web sites for United Nations offices at Geneva, Vienna and other locations are managed locally and have not been subject to direction from the Department of Public Information. The web sites of the regional commissions are all operated independently, with only the site of the Economic Commission for Africa being hosted on the United Nations web server in New York, but maintained directly from Addis Ababa. As such, while those offices are part of the Secretariat, their web sites are not under one operational umbrella for content or technical purposes. They also have separate web addresses, which are not uniform. The web addresses are provided in annex II for reference purposes.

13. In section E of its resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that, in formalizing the structure of the Information Technology Section the six official languages were treated equally. It also requested him to ensure that the goal of equal treatment of the six official languages was taken into account in the course of the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites.

14. As noted in paragraph 2 above, three positions funded from the general temporary assistance resources were converted into established posts. Consequently, the current level of staff resources for web site operations includes six Professional and five General Service established posts. These are supplemented by three Professional posts and one General Service post funded from general temporary assistance resources.

15. The United Nations CyberSchoolBus, which is part of the global teaching and learning project and is funded by the Trust Fund for Education, was made part of the Information Technology Section in January 1999.

16. On substantive and policy issues, an interdepartmental working group on Internet matters meets periodically to discuss progress in enhancement of the web site. The Publications Board recently finalized an administrative instruction on electronic publishing, laying down policy guidelines for the United Nations presence on the Internet. The guidelines deal with content planning, responsibility, domain names and publications policy. The communications group convened by the Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General also regularly reviews various web site activities and decides on policy matters.

17. It has proven difficult to identify qualified staff from within the Department for redeployment without affecting the delivery of other mandated activities. Furthermore, those who have been assigned have had to undergo additional training. In addition, the limited number of established posts relative to the workload has required a greater reliance on general temporary assistance funds. The recent conversion by the General Assembly of positions funded from the general temporary assistance funds into established posts is the first step in providing resources specifically for web site operations. However, the need to continuously update and maintain the web sites, which is an enormous ongoing task, will still consume the major

part of staff resources, leaving little time for activities relating to the enhancement and development of the web sites.

VI. Future development and proposals

18. The new momentum that has been created by the development of the United Nations web site will be maintained and built on, with the regular addition of new material. Emphasis will be placed on enhancing the contents and presentation in all the official languages as a clear priority in the development of the United Nations presence on the Internet. However, in order to fully reap the benefits of the new technology and to make any headway towards achieving a measure of language parity, as well as to be able to fully reap the potential of this medium, additional investments will be required over the course of the next few years to establish a firm foundation for the maintenance, enhancement and enrichment of the web sites.

19. In the context of considering the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites, it is also vital that the subject of content creation be seen as a separate requirement from the ongoing maintenance, coordination and management aspects. It must be emphasized that in order for any material to be made available on the web sites, it has first to be created. The main issue in this regard is that public information materials and other unofficial documents are not always routinely available in all of the official languages. On the other hand, all parliamentary documentation is available in all six official languages. These two issues — content creation and ongoing maintenance, coordination and management — need to be dealt with separately, because content creation is decentralized, with the author offices assuming responsibility, while coordination, management and overall enhancement remain centralized.

20. As indicated in earlier reports, an essential task would be to rationalize the structure of the web sites. This would require a study on the complete redesign and restructuring of the web sites in order to render them more flexible and user-friendly. Since the expertise required for such a study is not available in-house, a feasibility study would need to be conducted by outside industry experts. The estimated cost of the study is $100,000, which has not been included in the programme budget for the current biennium. The study would be conducted across departments in the Secretariat and would require approximately six months to be completed. It is expected that the study would formulate realistic proposals for redesigning, restructuring and refocusing the web sites, including the multilingual aspects, together with the necessary hardware and connectivity requirements, and the time-frame for implementation. Particular attention would need to be accorded to enhancing the search facility, extending it to cover all official languages. The study would delineate the comprehensive resource investments essential for the achievement of this objective across the entire web site operation — the Department of Public Information for the regular maintenance, enhancement and creation of public information content, the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management for the technological infrastructure and support services, as well as other content-providing departments and offices in the Secretariat and away from Headquarters.

21. As has been indicated in the earlier reports to the Committee on Information (A/AC.198/1999/6 and A/AC 198/1999/9), before embarking on any plan to enhance the web sites, the initial consideration should be to establish a sound foundation for ensuring the regular maintenance and enhancement. To that end, the Department of Public Information reiterates that proposal C-3 (see para. 5 above), constitutes the minimum resource requirements for this undertaking. In the light of recent redeployments and the conversion of three posts by the General Assembly, these requirements have been adjusted and are presented in annex I to the present report. In the absence of such administrative and budgetary support, the objective to narrow the increasing gaps among the web sites in the official languages, with the eventual achievement of parity, will not be attained.

22. The issue of making parliamentary documentation available on the web sites is a matter requiring further guidance from the General Assembly, which in resolution 51/211 F of 15 September 1997 indicated that parliamentary documentation be made available on a fee-for-service basis, determined by the associated costs.

VII. Some observations

23. The major difference between the mere performance of a task and performing it well lies in the impact realized from the performance. There is also a direct correlation between the level of resources allocated and the results achieved. It should be recognized that the current level of web site operation has been accomplished primarily through temporary and ad hoc arrangements, using temporary assistance funds and a creative realignment of activities.

24. This situation argues for a more coordinated approach to the United Nations web sites, since the management and coordination of web site issues can no longer continue to be an ad hoc activity, given the growing importance, visibility and high level of activity on the Internet.

25. The Department of Public Information, in undertaking the responsibility for the overall management, operations and enhancement of the web sites across the Secretariat as well as some of the offices away from Headquarters, has taken on additional tasks that could not have been foreseen and for which there has been no budgetary allocation. Instead, the costs associated with these additional tasks have been borne almost solely by the Department. The Department is looking into ways of enhancing cooperation with content-providing departments, while minimizing such associated costs.

26. Web site matters are fast encompassing the entire Organization. The fact that the Committee on Information scheduled a resumed session to consider a single issue, that of the web sites is a testimony to this. Internet matters have been discussed by various intergovernmental bodies and separate independent mandates have been given to the Department of Public Information on several occasions. In its resolutions 54/41 of 1 December 1999 and 54/92 of 6 December 1999 the General Assembly called upon the Department of Public Information to create web sites on Bethlehem 2000 and decolonization, respectively, within existing resources. While the Department will make every effort to establish those web sites within the appropriate time-frame in as many of the official languages as possible, it should be noted that these mandates will strain the already stretched resources and will detract from the main goal ahead, i.e., linguistic parity.

VIII. Recommendations and conclusions

27. It has now become necessary to consider Internet activity as an integral part of the Organization's work programme. As such, in the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, as well as in the budget proposals of the Department of Public Information for the biennium 2002-2003, the operation, maintenance and enhancement of the United Nations web sites will be included as part of a regular subprogramme. However, for the full multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the web sites, it is essential that each content-providing office include web-specific content to be made available on the web sites, as part of its regular programme activity, and make budgetary provisions accordingly. Provisions will also need to be made for the technological infrastructure support for these activities.

28. Furthermore, since Member States have indicated that web site activities should not be seen as replacing traditional means of communication, a realistic and cost-effective plan of action to meet the requirement of linguistic parity will need to be developed. In the event that Member States wish to approve of any new web site initiative involving expenditure, it would be necessary for a written statement of programme budget implications to be presented to the Committee on Information before it reaches any decision on the substance.

Annex I

Resource requirements of the Department of Public Information for the ongoing development and maintenance of United Nations web sites in all official languages

1. In order to ensure the continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the web sites in the official languages, the following additional resource requirements, above and beyond the resources allocated for this activity in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, would need to be considered by the General Assembly:

(a) The funding for the feasibility study proposed in paragraph 20 of the present report, amounting to $100,000;

(b) Eight new Professional posts and five General Service posts for the Information Technology Section in the Department of Public Information, as outlined below. These requirements have been updated following the conversion of three positions funded from general temporary assistance into established posts for the maintenance of sites in official languages and the redeployment of other posts from within the Department.

2. The following resource requirements pertain only to the requirements of the Department of Public Information with regard to the management, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites. They do not include infrastructure support requirements by the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, or requirements relating to the provision of content in other languages.

Component	*Posts required*	*Cost (United States dollars)*
Overall development	Web site applications specialist (P-3)	208 600
	Web site design specialist (P-3)	208 600
	Web site technical assistant (G-5/6)	115 500
	Web site design assistant (G-5/6)	115 500
	Secretary/clerk (G-4)	115 500
Each language unit (six units)	6 web site coordinators/editors (P-4)	1 502 400
	2 web site assistants (G-5/6)	231 000
Total cost of posts		**2 497 100**

Total Professional posts required: 8

Total General Service posts required: 5

Annex II

Web site addresses of United Nations offices away from Headquarters[a]

United Nations Office at Geneva	www.unog.ch
United Nations Office at Vienna	www.un.or.at
Economic Commission for Africa	www.un.org/Depts/eca
Economic Commission for Europe	www.unece.org
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	www.eclac.cl
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	www.unescap.org
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	www.escwa.org.lb

[a] Does not include web site addresses of United Nations information centres or of the programmes and funds in the United Nations system.

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Substantive questions

Proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005

Programme 23
Public information

Note by the Secretary-General

Introduction

1. The United Nations Secretariat is currently preparing the proposals for the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005. As recommended by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the General Assembly, in its resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998, approved revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. The attention of the Committee on Information is drawn to the following parts of the revised Regulations and Rules:

> "Regulation 4.2: The medium-term plan shall be a translation of legislative mandates into programmes and subprogrammes. Its objectives and strategies shall be derived from the policy orientations and goals set by the intergovernmental organs. It shall clearly reflect Member States' priorities as set out in legislation adopted by functional and regional intergovernmental bodies within their spheres of competence and by the General Assembly, on advice from the Committee for Programme and Coordination."

> "Regulation 4.8: The programmes and subprogrammes of the proposed medium-term plan shall be reviewed by the relevant sectoral, functional and regional intergovernmental bodies, if possible during the regular cycle of their meetings, prior to their review by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions shall consider the proposed medium-term plan in accordance with their terms of reference."

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"Regulation 4.15: Specialized intergovernmental and expert bodies, when reviewing the relevant programmes of the medium-term plan within their sphere of competence, shall refrain from establishing priorities that are not consistent with the overall priorities in the medium-term plan."

2. The draft medium-term plan for programme 23, Public information, submitted herewith, contains the overall orientation of the Department of Public Information, the draft narrative of the subprogrammes on promotional services, information services, library services and publication services, and the main legislative mandates for the subprogrammes adopted by the relevant intergovernmental organs. Members of the Committee will recall that the first draft of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 was submitted to the Committee for its consideration at its twenty-first session in 1999 (see A/AC.198/1999/8). The revised draft is being submitted to the Committee for its further review, with a view to receiving formal endorsement, as appropriate.

Programme 23
Public information

Overall orientation

23.1 The overall purpose of the programme is to increase awareness and understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among peoples of the world. In order to help build broad-based global public support for the Organization's goals, issues of concern to the international community, including those addressed by major international conferences and the special sessions of the General Assembly, are highlighted. The mandates for the programme are provided by the General Assembly, initially in its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, and subsequently in resolutions on questions relating to information, the most recent one being Assembly resolutions 54/82 A and B. Within the Secretariat, substantive responsibility for the programme is vested in the Department of Public Information.

23.2 The programme strategy is based on the premise that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations. By enhancing public awareness and understanding of the goals and ideals of the United Nations, the Organization will be able to galvanize universal support for its objectives. To that end, emphasis will be placed on publicizing effectively and in a timely manner the activities of the Organization and the relevance of its work to the daily lives and concerns of people everywhere through the main target audiences, such as the media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, business and professional organizations and other segments of civil society. Particular attention will be given to the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, to other countries with special needs, including African countries with economies in transition, in order to contribute to bridging the gap between developing and developed countries in the field of public information and communications.

23.3 In order to project an image of the Organization as an open and transparent public institution, emphasis will be placed on the continuing development of a culture of communications throughout the Organization. Partnerships will be strengthened at the Headquarters and field levels, which is essential to enable the Department to define the themes to be highlighted during the period of the medium-term plan and to coordinate the public information activities of the Organization with a view to presenting a unified image. Information and communications plans and campaigns will be implemented in collaboration with departments and offices to publicize the work of the Organization in their respective sectors. Cooperation among all organizations of the United Nations system will also be strengthened. Cooperation and partnerships with redisseminators will be pursued at all levels, both at Headquarters and in the field. The various elements of the system will work together in a more news-centred, media-friendly multimedia operation, providing information directly to international news editors in all Member States, including through the network of United Nations information centres, services and offices worldwide.

23.4 Increased use will be made of the latest technology, in both the traditional and electronic media, including the Internet, to deliver news directly and instantaneously to the media worldwide. Particular attention will be given to tailoring the news disseminated to different regions, bearing in mind their technological capacity.

23.5 Every effort will be made to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations web site, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization. Editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full compliance with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly will be observed.

23.6 The Committee on Information provides overall guidance to the Department in its implementation of the programme.

Subprogramme 1
Promotional services

Objective

23.7 The objective of the subprogramme is to promote awareness of the central role of the United Nations and

its relevance to the lives of peoples everywhere in addressing the challenges facing humankind.

Strategy

23.8 Within the Department of Public Information, responsibility for implementing the subprogramme lies primarily with the Public Affairs Division, which is assisted by the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the network of United Nations information centres and information services. The strategy is to manage the public image of the Organization effectively and to stimulate the development of a unified vision of the United Nations system at work. In this context, the Department will work closely with other substantive departments of the United Nations and with the organizations of the United Nations system to develop thematic information campaigns on priority issues of concern to the international community and to implement them at the international, regional and national levels. The campaigns will deal, in particular, with peace and security, including building a culture of peace and non-violence; economic and social development, including eradicating poverty, combating racism and promoting human rights and self-determination; and the question of Palestine.

23.9 To mobilize support for its information campaigns, partnerships with key constituencies, including the media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, professional and business organizations and other segments of civil society, will be strengthened. The network of information centres will also strengthen and expand partnerships with civil society at the national and local levels. The centres will forge closer links with educational organizations to reach students, including through the use of the Internet and videoconferencing where available. Special attention will be given to developing the CyberSchoolBus, the young people's segment of the United Nations web site, and transforming it into a locale where young people and teachers alike can converge for the purpose of facilitating teaching and learning about the United Nations and its activities through interactive web pages.

23.10 Direct outreach to the general public will be provided, *inter alia*, through the United Nations web site and through an informative experience for visitors to Headquarters and the offices in Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna. In order to convey the Organization's message to as wide an audience as possible, the six official languages and, to the extent possible, local languages at information centres, will be used in promotional activities.

23.11 Promotional services will include the issuance of public information materials, including booklets, pamphlets, fact sheets, wallcharts, information kits and press releases; the holding of press conferences and briefings; the organization of special events, such as observance of United Nations commemorative days and years, round tables for journalists and editors, seminars and workshops; the training of broadcasters and journalists from developing countries; and the organization of internship programmes. Electronic, audio and video technology will also be utilized. Exhibits, guided tours and lectures will be provided to highlight the work of the Organization.

Expected accomplishments

23.12 The public's understanding of and interest in the goals and objectives of the Organization would be enhanced, and public support for the work of the Organization would be strengthened.

Indicators of achievement

23.13 Indicators of achievement would include an increase in the level of interest shown by the target audience; an increase in the number of requests for and enquiries about the promotional products and services; an increase in the number of visitors to the United Nations web site; and an increase in the number of visitors to United Nations premises under the guided tour programme.

Subprogramme 2
Information services

Objective

23.14 The objective of this subprogramme is to increase the interest and access of news organizations and media to up-to-date news and other information about the Organization and its activities.

Strategy

23.15 Within the Department of Public Information, the responsibility for implementing the subprogramme lies primarily with the News and Media Division, which is assisted by the Office of the Spokesman of the

Secretary-General, the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the United Nations information centres and information services. The changing needs of news organizations, the convergence of traditional media with the Internet and the capacity of new technology for instantaneous global communication will allow the direct delivery to the news media worldwide of breaking news and media products, including news packages for television and radio (including live transmissions) and complete multimedia coverage of United Nations activities.

23.16 In order to ensure faster access to news and other information about the Organization, a multimedia Internet news service, backed by an e-mail "news alert" service, direct delivery of radio broadcasts and the increased use of live radio and television feeds, will be developed. Video programming for use and dissemination over the Internet will also be developed.

23.17 Radio remains one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Organization for the dissemination of information. United Nations radio and its outputs will be made more immediately available directly to both listeners and the mass media. The development of new communications technologies, such as webcasting, digital audio broadcasting, satellite distribution and direct satellite broadcasting, offer vast opportunities for widening the traditional reach of United Nations radio.

23.18 Work on the development, enhancement and enrichment of the United Nations web site in all official languages, and in local languages by the United Nations information centres, with the ultimate goal of accelerating the dissemination of information and data to a wider audience, will continue. The structure of the United Nations web site will be rationalized to render it more user-friendly and flexible.

23.19 In order to cope effectively with the fast pace of technology, particular attention will be paid to modernizing the technical and physical requirements of television, radio and photographic coverage through a transition to digital technology in all media.

Expected accomplishments

23.20 The expected accomplishments by the end of the plan period would include an increase in coverage of the Organization's goals and activities by the media organizations around the world and an increase in public awareness about the issues addressed by the Organization.

Indicators of achievement

23.21 Indicators of achievement would include an increase in the number of accesses and links from external sites to the United Nations news sites; an increase in the size of audience reached through redisseminating broadcasters and its geographical spread; an increase in the number of enquiries about and requests for news material; and positive feedback from the media organizations on the relevance and timeliness of news material provided.

Subprogramme 3
Library services

Objective

23.22 The objective of the subprogramme is to facilitate access to timely and up-to-date library products and services for use by delegates, permanent missions of Member States, the Secretariat, researchers and depository libraries worldwide.

Strategy

23.23 Responsibility for the subprogramme lies with the Library and Information Resources Division and the United Nations information centres and information services. By maintaining, preserving and making available an archival collection of United Nations documents, publications and oral history tapes and transcripts, the Division will facilitate access to and use of library services and supply bibliographic and factual information about the Organization and its work. The delivery of customized information directly to the users' desktops through Internet services will be expanded, and training to users (permanent missions, Secretariat staff and depository librarians) in the use of library services will be provided. In addition, access to commercially available electronic information services will be made available in a cost-effective way through the formation of a consortium of United Nations system organizations.

23.24 The capacity of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library will be increased through networking with other libraries. The United Nations depository libraries, numbering more than 350, will be further developed into effective channels of communication. The

electronic delivery of documents to depository libraries will be promoted where feasible to ensure rapid, complete and cost-effective document distribution. The network of United Nations libraries sharing responsibility for the indexing and preservation of United Nations documents will be strengthened. Technical assistance will be provided in the development of a unified United Nations library system at the country level.

23.25 In-house production and processing of data, including the production and issuance of updated standards and guidelines for bibliographic control, the issuance of multilingual reference tools and the updating of indexing terminology in the six official languages, will continue to be improved. Furthermore, work on the conversion of older United Nations documents in all languages from microfiche and paper to digital format for the purpose of uploading to the optical disk system and the United Nations web site will continue.

23.26 The Internet site of the Library as a major source of United Nations information will be enriched and further developed to the maximum extent possible in all six official languages, with multilingual retrieval capabilities. The major database, the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS), will also use the Internet as its main platform for dissemination to the public.

Expected accomplishments

23.27 Expected accomplishments of the subprogramme would include faster and greater access by users to products and services of the Library.

Indicators of achievement

23.28 Indicators of achievement would include an increase in the number of requests and enquiries for the products and services of the Library, an increase in the number of visitors to the Library's web page and positive feedback from participants in training programmes on the effective utilization of the services of the Library.

Subprogramme 4
Publication services

Objective

23.29 The objectives of this subprogramme are to increase readership of United Nations publications in all formats and to increase understanding of the breadth of its activities.

Strategy

23.30 Responsibility for the subprogramme lies with the Library and Information Resources Division. The Division will provide publication services, including the development of policies and procedures for the production of print and electronic products, cartographic products, geographic information and graphic design as well as management of the publications programme. Increased use will be made of the evolving technology to improve the quality of graphic design and printing of all printed publications. The Publications Board will be strengthened so as to harmonize publication policies and to better monitor and coordinate the publication programme of the Organization.

23.31 The Division is responsible for the preparation and publication of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, the *United Nations Chronicle*, *Africa Recovery* and *Development Business*. In addition to the printed versions, electronic access to the *United Nations Chronicle* and *Africa Recovery* web sites will be enhanced to increase readership. The *Yearbook of the United Nations* will also be made available for sale on CD-ROM. The availability of on-line subscriptions to *Development Business* will facilitate the timely dissemination of procurement opportunities and collaborative venture opportunities generated by projects implemented by organizations throughout the United Nations system.

23.32 Cartographic products and geographic information services in support of substantive activities of the Secretariat, including requirements of the Security Council, will be provided. A common United Nations geographic database, to be made accessible through web server technology, would be established and maintained. Efforts to strengthen multilingualism in print and electronic media would be continued.

Expected accomplishments

23.33 An expected accomplishment would be a greater interest in United Nations publications.

Indicators of achievement

23.34 Indicators of achievement would include an increase in the number of subscriptions to United Nations publications and in the number of publications sold and an increase in the number of visitors to the web sites of United Nations publications.

Legislative mandates

Programme 23
Public information

General Assembly resolutions

1086 (XI)	Public information activities of the United Nations
2897 (XXVI)	Review and appraisal of the United Nations information policies and activities
3047 (XXVII)	Revenue-producing activities
33/115 A	Questions relating to information
33/115 B	
33/115 C	
34/182	Questions relating to information
53/25	International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)
53/78 E	United Nations Disarmament Information Programme
53/90	Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s
53/183	Implementation of the Programme of the International Conference on Population and Development
53/243 A	Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace
53/243 B	
54/23	Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development
54/24	Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: a society for all ages
54/28	United Nations Decade of International Law
54/41	Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat
54/64	Multilingualism
54/68	Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
54/81	Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects
54/82 A	Questions relating to information
54/82 B	
54/91	Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

54/92	Dissemination of information on decolonization
54/113	United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations
54/120	Policies and programmes involving youth
54/121	Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons: towards a society for all in the twenty-first century
54/122	United Nations literacy decade: education for all
54/124	Follow-up to the International Year of the Family
54/125	Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders
54/132	International cooperation against the world drug problem
54/134	International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
54/141	Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action
54/150	International Decade of the World's Indigenous People
54/154	Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination and the convening of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance
54/157	International Covenants on Human Rights
54/158	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
54/159	Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance
54/161	United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004, and public information activities in the field of human rights
54/173	Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization
54/176	National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights
54/206	Implementation of the commitments and policies agreed upon in the Declaration on International Economic Cooperation, in particular the Revitalization of Economic Growth and Development of the Developing Countries, and implementation of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade
54/208	Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

54/218	Implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly
54/224	Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
54/231	Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence
54/232	Implementation of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty
54/235	Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s
54/248	Pattern of conferences (sect. E, Information technology)
54/249	Questions relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001